

Over the next several weeks, you will hear a lot about our nation's health care system. After months of meetings and round table discussions with area health professionals, patients and working families, I want to tell you why I think reforming our system is crucial to the wellbeing of our citizens and to the long term health of our economy. I know you're interested in reform too; when I held a telephone town hall on health care reform earlier this spring, 4,700 residents of Ohio's Sixth Congressional District participated. I've never had more people on the line at one time who wanted to discuss a single issue. The United States has the most expensive health care system in the world. We spend almost 50% more per person on health care than the next nation and we are no healthier for it. We have more than 46 million uninsured Americans who either do without care or who rely on emergency room visits. This type of care drives up already skyrocketing costs. In fact, *insured* families pay an additional \$100 billion annually through higher premiums to cover the *uninsured*.

If we do nothing, the fiscal health of our country and the health care coverage that families currently have is at risk. Given current trends, the cost of an employer-sponsored family health plan will reach \$24,000 by 2016 – an 84% increase. Because of rising costs, it is estimated that one in five employers will likely stop offering health benefits in the next three to five years.

In sum, this is about insuring the uninsured, protecting those who have current coverage, and ultimately reducing health care costs for everyone. I hope you'll agree with me that it is a much better idea to tackle this issue now.

I support a plan that lowers costs, offers greater choice and ensures quality care for all. What we are looking at in Congress is not socialized medicine and it will not be a carbon copy of Canada's system. This will be a uniquely American plan that builds on what we have while fixing what is broken.

I want more choices for you and your family.

If you have health insurance and like it, you can keep it.

If you like your doctor, stay with them.

And if you are among those without coverage or are under-insured, you should get the coverage you need at a reasonable price.

In addition, that coverage will be available if you have a pre-existing condition or if you lose or change your job.

Reforming a severely broken system will not be cheap, and I know people are worried about what this new healthcare system will cost.

In Congress, we are examining dozens of ways to pay for a better system.

We are looking to our friends across the healthcare industry to do away with costly duplication, to implement health IT and to come up with other ways to cut costs.

House Democrats are working toward making this plan "budget-neutral" so we don't add to our debt.

We will face tough decisions on how to pay for reform.

However, doing nothing will not save us money; doing nothing will ultimately cost all of us more. In the last ten years under the current system, premiums have doubled while associated out of pocket expenses have continued to rise.

In the end, I would like to find a way to pay for health care reform that will lead to lower premiums and better coverage.

That is something I think we can all agree upon.

I pledge to keep an open mind as we work through the debate that will shape our health care future. I also urge you to keep an open mind and remember that I will vote for your interests.

I will vote to protect the health care we have and to improve what isn't working so that we do not bankrupt this country and our grandchildren in the future.